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May 31, 1962 - Thursday

Prince Dimitri came to see me this morning, with an artist and another friend. We were all photographed together, displaying a picture of a Greek Island recently visited by Mrs. Kennedy. It is to be forwarded to the White House as a present.

Next, Lt. Governor Poletti of New York, and Gates Davison (son of Trubee) representing the Fair Corporation for the 1964-65 World's Fair in New York, came to see me. The British Government and British industry have refused to participate in it. The reasons are complicated, and we shall have to endeavor to have them change their minds.

We had a lunch today at home for

Sir William and Lady Haley (Editor, London TIMES)
Mr. and Mrs. Roy Larsen (Chairman, TIME-LIFE)
Mrs. Herrick
Mr. Burden Muller
Mrs. Severne
Mr. Clark
Mr. and Mrs. Milstein
Mr. and Mrs. Bingham
Mr. and Mrs. Tyerman (Editor, The Economist)
Mr. John Russell (Foreign Office)

For the first time since their arrival, I saw my dear friends, the Binghams, and had a chance to chat with Barry. They are leaving tomorrow to return home, and Rowland Burden-Muller is quitting us at the same time. Rowland gave me this morning a beautiful little Barye bronze eagle.

E and I went to the opening of an exhibition of works of art from Oberlin College, at Kenwood, the former Iveah place. It is a lovely Adam house. Oliver Franks and a good many other people I knew were there. I made a speech, more or less as follows:

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The ducks drop their eggs on the lawn, or in the outdoor copper buckets that our chef fills with breadcrumbs, or in clefts of trees, or in a shallow pool, imperilling passing goldfish, and seem to have departed from all the norms of motherhood. The drakes waddle indifferently about, spending most of their time in sleep.

I do not expect the Foreign Office to help me in dealing with such erratic behavior. The amatory instincts of mallards, their gynaecological peculiarities, their disdainful disregard of what is ordinarily considered conventional in wildfowl conduct, is immaterial from a diplomatic viewpoint.

But it has posed for me a disturbing question. Profiting by an inexplicable divegation on the part of these ducks from their ordinary nesting customs, our place has become a concentration centre for crows. They have gathered here by hundreds. Perched in the tallest trees, they descend upon the newly hatched fledglings and decapitate them. Moreover, the number of eggs they have eaten defies enumeration. In all the London clubs, members addicted to the consumption of plover and gull eggs could not, during the season, according to my calculations, have gulleted the equivalent of what these damned crows have swallowed of embryonic game birds.

I realize that the Foreign Office has graver things to consider than my preoccupation on this count. I suggest, however, a possible remedy. I am not at home most of the time when the assaults I have mentioned occur. My wife has done her best to meet the situation, but to no avail. The other day, when engaged in hanging pictures with a transient French aid, a waddling group of ducklings was espied by them making their way--as is necessary immediately after hatching--to the nearest water. A moment after they had admired this engaging spectacle, a couple of watchful crows swooped down on the little brood, and snapped off the heads of two of them. Accompanied by spaniels, my wife, and the shocked Frenchman, burst out of the house, and saved the rest of the flock from immediate destruction. A pair of footmen were posted for the remainder of the afternoon in the reedy ground adjoining the pond, to counter further massacre. The butler was instructed to use his racing glasses to survey the scene and direct salvage operations. In the process, another little mallard life was lost.

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